

DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

news release

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PRELIMINARY GRIZZLY "CRITICAL HABITAT" PROPOSAL IN THE WORKS

A proposal to designate critical habitat for the grizzly bear in certain parts of Idaho, Montana, Washington, and Wyoming is currently being prepared, Nathaniel P. Reed, Assistant Secretary of the Interior, announced today.

Designation of areas as critical habitat for this species--officially listed as threatened--would not result in a "steel cage" being placed around them, Reed said. Many of the current land uses in the areas would not be affected by the proposal.

Private and State activities where no Federal funding or authorization are involved would not be interfered with by the critical habitat determination. For example, hunting of game animals and other State or privately funded and authorized recreational activities would not be affected.

Critical habitat determinations are made by the Department of the Interior in accordance with the Endangered Species Act of 1973. Section 7 of that Act requires all Federal agencies to ensure that none of their actions jeopardizes the existence of endangered or threatened species or results in destruction or adverse modification of habitat critical to their survival.

The critical habitat proposal for this threatened species will include land areas which are essential to its survival and recovery. Reed emphasized that this is a proposal, and may be subject to change as additional biological evidence is gathered.

The proposal is expected to be published in the Federal Register sometime in August. This will notify the public of the specific areas under consideration and will invite public comments and information during a 90-day comment period. Public hearings will also be held in the affected States at places and times to be announced later in the Federal Register and in news releases. The Governors and appropriate agencies of these States will also be asked to advise the Department concerning this proposal.

Reed stated that he knew that the vast majority of Americans supported the concept of protecting the critical habitat that the grizzly bear must have if it is to survive in the "lower 48" States.

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